

# Americans and Iraqis alike die for unclear reasons

Taleisha Bowen

News Editor

Americans were shocked and horrified to learn that on March 31, four U.S. civilians were ambushed and killed in Fallujah, Iraq. Their bodies, burned from their automobiles exploding, were dragged through the streets of Fallujah, and two were then hanged from a bridge across the Euphrates River.

Religious leaders in Iraq quickly denounced the actions of the mob, but the damage was already done at that point. The families of Jerry Zovko, Michael Teague, Scott Helvenston and Wesley John Kealoha Batalona will never see these men alive again.

These men weren't soldiers, though all of them were veterans of the Army or Navy. They worked for a North Carolina security company charged with storing and keeping track of military food rations in that area of Iraq. But they were Americans, and that was more than good enough for the

mob that killed them.

It is doubtful, however, that the mob realized the effect their actions would have.

In the two weeks since the four deaths, the violence has escalated. Six hundred Iraqis have died in hospitals in the Fallujah region, after a lockdown on the town turned into a siege on April 5. The death count becomes much higher when one realizes that more are dying before reaching care facilities.

"I could see many bodies in the streets. Hundreds were lying in the street. Relatives were too scared to get them," Samir Rabee, told *The New York Times*. Rabee is a Fallujah resident who managed to flee the city during a lull in the fighting.

Bodies of the dead are being buried wherever there is space, including soccer fields. Fallujah residents have dubbed one such field "Graveyard of the Martyrs."

For surely that's the title deserved by

anyone brave enough to take on the Mighty American Military?

"What I think you will find is 95 percent of those (bodies) were military-age males that were killed in the fighting," Marine Lt. Col. Brennan Byrne told *The New York Times*.

But how many of those "military age males" are inexperienced 16-year-old boys, or grizzled 50-year-old men? How many were extremists simply wanting their town back from the invading American troops?

How is that an extreme view?

Martyrs, indeed.

Now, I'm a military brat. My father and two uncles currently serve in the Air Force, and I have two more uncles in the Army. About a third of my high school class went directly into the military upon — or even before — graduation.

My sympathies lie firmly with every American soldier — and civilian — who is risking their life at the say-so of the current administration.

But I also believe that enough is too much.

Iraqi militants, with demands that U.S. and other forces withdraw from their country, have taken hostage nationals from Russia, China, Japan, and America in Iraq — for whatever reason. Can you really blame them?

The guerillas have threatened to burn the hostages alive if their demands are not met.

So, of course, our government will formulate another rescue a la Jessica Lynch, and the Graveyard of Martyrs will have a few new residents.

Martyrs indeed.

A death toll of 600-plus Iraqis in Fallujah in the past two weeks, among countless other Iraqi deaths since the U.S. occupation began. Death from bullets and explosions and fire and God only knows what else.

A death toll of more than 600 Americans in Iraq over the past year.

A minimum of 1,200 souls sacrificed.

How many more must die?

## The Last Hope for Democracy: the Iraqis themselves

Adam Waxman

Guest Writer

Sitting outside the cafeteria, tabling for the March 20 march in Fayetteville, North Carolina, it seemed everyone wanted to talk high geopolitical analysis.

"Bring the troops home?" people asked, seeing some of our flyers from International ANSWER. "I opposed the war, but we can't bring the troops home — we've got to stay the course in Iraq, we broke it, we have to fix it ..."

It used to be, I would be right there with them. I couldn't understand the logic of withdrawal — after all, the United States couldn't just say to the Iraqis, "well, we killed a bunch of your citizens, bombed your bridges and roads, and took out anyone with any governmental experience in your society — see ya!" We surely needed to stay in Iraq, and help to rebuild the country and transition the society to a democracy. Maybe it wouldn't be a Western democracy, but it would be at least pluralistic.

Now, after all the death and carnage of the last few weeks, the uprising sponsored in large part by radical Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr, I see that the United States must leave Iraq. We must leave because we cannot rebuild Iraq — only the Iraqis themselves can do this. Make no mistake — I don't support International ANSWER's position that the international community as a whole should just pick up stakes and run. However, the United States cannot be part of the process, except possibly as a donor to the reconstruction efforts.

What made me switch positions? It had to be Bush and the CPA's utter inability to face the situation in Iraq and what seems to be their utter indifference. Bush simply responds to the violence by saying we'll "stay the course," whatever the hell that means.

In reality, Bush wants to turn power over to the Iraqis by June 30 to show progress in the war for his domestic political campaign. Who he's turning sovereignty over to is another question, one he hasn't really answered. In

my view, Bush has two options to avoid a "Vietnamization" of Iraq.

First, he could simply withdraw and allow Sadr's (along with other Shiite) forces to take control. Along with providing political leadership, the mosques of Iraq have shown they have the capacity to serve as a social structure — in the last few days, Iraq's mosques have coordinated sending food and other supplies to the U.S.-besieged city of Fallujah, as U.S. soldiers looked on. Now, this strategy probably would be the worst from a U.S. P.R.'s perspective — it's almost certain that Sadr, in an alliance with more moderate Ayatollah Al-Sistani, would set up some kind of Iran-style theocracy in Iraq. Sistani's been a bit coy about his views of democracy — he's been critical of Sadr's tactics, but also launched a massive protest against the newly proposed constitution. Furthermore, though Sadr has been able thus far to unite warring ethnic factions in Iraq, allowing him (and by extension, radical Shiites) to take control might well lead to civil war.

The second option is to allow the U.N. to fully take control of the reconstruction process. There are several reasons why this would be tough to pull off, mostly involving the current bunch living in the White House. The international community has almost no respect for Bush and Co., and would be unlikely to support more U.N. troops going to Iraq, given all the recent violence. Therefore, some kind of dual arrangement might need to be found — the various Shiite/Sunni/Kurdish militias could be united into a national force, with oversight, funding, advice, and involvement from the U.N. Other questions like relationships with Kuwait, Iran, and the Kurdish north could be figured out once there was more political stability. Whatever the solution, one thing remains clear: We must withdraw from Iraq, and withdraw now. If we do not, we will fail. If we do not, we will be doing a disservice not just to memories of the thousands of people killed, but also to the future generations that will have to live with our mistake.